



# RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COLORADO

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The Hermit's Cave

# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

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# CBS

From Broadcasting 9/19/77

Unhindered by custom, uninhibited by formidable opposition, network carved a niche in journalism history; it was determination of Paley that spread to the Whites, Murrows and a legion of dedicated newsmen

When the Germans marched into Austria in March of 1938, William Paley, sick in bed, got the word from his executive vice president, Ed Klauber, that the network wasn't going to get news out of Vienna. A phone call from Mr. Paley to his friend who headed the Austrian Broadcasting Co. in the occupied city did no good.

"So I called Klauber," Mr. Paley remembered in a *Broadcasting* interview last year, "and I said . . . we have to do something special, something that's never been done before; and then I thought of the idea of the *World News Roundup*, of having people from various capitals going on the air one after another."

About an hour later he got his engineers' reaction: impossible. "I said 'there's no reason in the world I can think of why it can't be done. It has to be

done. You go back to them.' So he called me back later and said 'OK, we found a way ...'"

CBS News was born and developed from how Mr. Paley and his hired hands found a way. It had been the press association refusal to supply news to broadcasters that brought the Columbia News Service into the news gathering business in 1933. It was the reporting demands of World War II that pushed the service from adolescence toward maturity.

But then there's also "tradition"-one encompassing both philosophy and personality.

Palmer Williams, who joined CBS to work with Ed Morrow and Fred Friendly on *See It Now* and now serves as senior producer of *60 Minutes*, talks of it in terms of "good strong medicine"- "the absolute top priority interest" top management has shown in news without becoming directly involved with it. A former CBS News president, Sig Mickelson, says that "when the crunch came, you could be pretty sure management was behind you". Dave Klinger, who retired as CBS News director of business affairs after 24 years with the company, speaks of "getting the facts no matter where the chips fell".

Said an ex- CBSer David Schoumacher (now anchor at ABC-affiliated WJLA-TV Washington) in a 1974 *Washington Post* feature: "At CBS you are very much aware of the tradition, and it goes all the way back to the radio days and Ed Murrow. You have a view of yourself that is not much different than the feeling of a *New York Times* Man ...that you are better than anyone else." Don Hewitt executive producer of *60 Minutes* who'll celebrate his 30th year with CBS next February, speaks of CBS starting out with the best team and "we always felt we had something to live up to."

That there was a master plan in the birth and development of CBS News seems doubtful. That there was hardly enough time to react to growing pains--let alone ponder them--seems certain.

In the early 1930's and before, CBS relied on the wire services for newsgathering. In 1928 it aired its first presidential election returns (four years later the network devoted an entire evening to them). The newspaper stories were supplemented by radio's own news-on occasion. In 1930, there were 23 CBS broadcasts from London on the Five-Power Navel Disarmament Conference and the following year, CBS

carried the address of Pope Pius XI on the ninth anniversary of his coronation.

But as a 1935 *Fortune* magazine article pointed out, scoops by radio were more likely to be the exception. "Once in a while a microphone with portable transmitter arrives on a scene of actual news. The greatest break of this kind was the Ohio State penitentiary fire in April 1930, which CBS broadcast from the spot, including the screams of the dying. "It was in that year that Ed Klauber, former night city editor of the *New York Times*, came over CBS, as did H. V. Kaltenborn and Boake Carter, who were to become regular CBS commentators.

The security of knowing that the press associations were there supplying the news ended with the 1932 election where CBS and other radio networks beat the newspapers with the facts the newspapers had collected. Wire service feeds to the networks stopped.

The CBS reaction was to form its own newsgathering service. Given the job was the CBS publicity director at the time, Paul White. But even before Mr. White was handed the assignment, it was becoming clear to publishers that the infant news medium was a threat both in the race to break

stories and in the competition for advertising dollars.

**It showed up conspicuously in early 1933 after an unsuccessful assassination attempt on President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in Miami. An eyewitness account showed up on the CBS network within 90 minutes, thanks to CBS Technical Director Edwin K. Cohan who happened to be vacationing there at the time.**

Later that year, CBS began its first regularly scheduled daily newscasts, five minutes at noon and 4:30 p.m. and 15 minutes at 11:00 p.m. Its newsgathering strides however didn't last long, as the *Fortune* article continued: "With characteristic initiative, CBS took the lead to organize its own news service, collected 600 correspondents and a sponsor (General Mills) and began feeding its own news... As a result, the newspapers threatened to strike CBS program schedules from their columns and to organize a lobby in Washington for stricter government control of radio. Mr. Paley's news dream collapsed in favor of a newspaper-authorized Press-Radio Bureau which today (1935) feeds news to the networks under certain conditions". The basic restriction was that radio wouldn't be getting the beat on newspaper material.

But again, it was a reaction-this time to the movement toward war in Europe-that brought CBS out of the compromise and back into the daily reporting business. The demand for radio news was growing rapidly.

Before the Germans went into Austria. Edward R. Morrow was in Europe and as European director for CBS in 1937 doubled the size of the staff with the hiring of William L. Shirer to assist in the production of musical and informational shows. Staff building continued with the likes of Eric Sevareid, Charles Collingwood, Larry LeSueur, Howard K. Smith, Richard C. Hottelet, Winston Burdett and Cecil Brown.

With the German takeover of Austria, Mr. Murrow chartered a 27-seat plane for \$1,000 and flew from Prague to Vienna. That proved to be Mr. Murrow's first assignment as a war correspondent. (The first Europe-to-America combat reports had come two years earlier with Mr. Kaltemborn reporting on the Battle of Irun during the Spanish Civil War)

While March 1938 turned out to be the month of the multiple pickup and the start of the *World News Roundup*,

September of that year brought the first two-way interview, with Mr. Kaltenborn beginning his frequent discussions with people in London, Prague and other cities. The following March the two techniques were combined-as CBS pioneered the fourway hook-up with listeners hearing Mr. Kaltenborn in Chicago, Mr. Murrow in London, Mr. Shirer in Paris and Melvin K. Whiteleather, an AP correspondent, in Prague. As a CBS release the following day (March 20, 1939) said, "It took from early Saturday morning to 2 p.m. Sunday afternoon to clear radio channels for half an hour."

By the end of 1940 CBS had 39 correspondents across the world, and that year broadcast more than 2,000 pick-ups from Europe, the Far East and Latin America. By 1941, the number of correspondents and stringers had risen to 65.

For that time and for some years to come, CBS News meant CBS radio news. But experimentation with television was going on. Robert Skedgell, now CBS director of broadcast research, was a copy boy in Paul White's newsroom where the boss asked him if he wanted to write TV news. "Hell, I hardly knew what television was" Mr. Skedgell recalls.

He was sent over to CBS's experimental WCBW above Grand Central Station in New York to form a news team consisting of himself and the on-air man, Dick Hubbel. Admittedly, the main CBS concern "was the technical aspects of putting on the show," says Mr. Skedgell, but again events prompted journalistic innovation, primitive as it was. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, WCBW aired a nine-hour broadcast, TV's first instant news special.

"We had a lot of panel talks that day," Mr. Skedgell recalls, adding that the station borrowed reporters including Linton Wells and George Fielding Eliot "when they were not being used on radio.."

(A decade before, CBS had used the interview technique for the first regularly scheduled news program series on television in 1931 with *Bill Schudt's Going to Press* where reporters and editors were interview on news subjects).

When special television graphics were needed to present President Roosevelt's declaration of war, the CBS television news team brought an American flag up to the studio, and turned a fan behind it, and while it waved, ran the audio. During the war, CBS cut back WCBW's programming from 15 to four hours a day.

Airtime for radio news, however, during the war jumped some 40% and from Pearl Harbor to VJ-Day, CBS Radio presented some 37,500 broadcasts, said to amount to about nine solid months of war-related programs in total. Most remembered from those broadcast is Edward R. Murrow and within one of his "This is London" reporting, he presented a taste of working conditions overseas.

"This-is London. I'm supposed to tell you how the news reaches you. If this report is disjointed-well, that's the way things happen. All the American networks are operating from a basement here in London. It wouldn't be big enough for a vice president's office back in New York...

There's a shortage of telephones. I can get through to our New York office in less time than it takes to telephone a man upstairs. There are three small studios, each about big enough to hold a Shetland pony, or a couple of broadcasters.

"Occasionally a burst of gunfire or the roar of a falling bomb sweeps through the room where we do our writing-that's someone listening to a record from the front, editing it before broadcasting. A censor comes in with what's left of the script. As a matter of fact, the censorship has been fast a reasonably intelligent.

"You get accustomed to these long-distance conversation after a few years, but that first two-way with the beachhead produced a pleasant thrill. I gave (Bill) Downs the go-ahead. Twenty seconds later, the bottom fell out of the circuit and he became unintelligible. That is the way it goes.

"Over the far shore the boys stumble through the dark to reach their camouflaged transmitters. They speak their stories. Sometimes they get through and sometimes they don't.

After the war, Mr. Murrow took over as CBS vice president and director of public affairs, but for less than two years. He returned to broadcasting saying that "in-baskets and out-baskets aren't for me."

It was in 1949 that CBS received the first Peabody award for television journalism. But, as Sig Mickelson recalls, it was a long hall extending well into the 1950's. Compared with NBC, he said, CBS News was in a "weak secondary position." On the day he took control over CBS television news in 1951, he recalls having only 14 on his staff. Douglas Edwards (who had been anchoring and coproducing a fifteen minute

news, program, *CBS-TV News with Douglas Edwards*) four film editors (who doubled as cameramen at the CBS-owned New York station), three directors, two graphics artists and four writer/assignment editors.

Mr. Mickelson remembers having to rely on stringers, because "we had no cameramen in the field." This, he says, was along side NBC which "already had its own camera team across the world." Mr. Mickelson claims it took him a two-year fight with management to get \$2 million film-gathering budget. Compounding the television news department's troubles, he says, was the "constant rivalry" with CBS radio news, especially in the use of personnel. by 1954, he says, "the corporate officials decided there was enough rivalry between radio and television" and the departments were merged. Mr. Mickelson became vice president of CBS and general manager of CBS News

The growth of television news, however, can be shown through a comparison of political convention coverage in the years 1948 and 1952, the first "a radio year," according to Mr. Mickelson, and the second, "television's." Recalls Douglas Edwards, the TV newsman sent to cover the first 1948 event: "I went to Philadelphia with no firm

assignment of the convention...We were ad libbing, we were improvising." After the first day he was assigned anchorman and had two people working with him, Ed Murrow and Quincy Howe. Two small studios were available to them--one with a TV camera and another with a monitor and a microphone. "We couldn't even see the convention floor except on the monitor," he remembers, and were unable to switch to the floor. Still CBS television began its tradition of gavel-to-gavel coverage, with the three-man team, as well as the carbons provided by the radio newsmen.

Mr. Cronkite, who had been brought in from WTOP-TV Washington by Mr. Mickelson, anchored every convention and election night coverage from the time with the exception of 1964 when Robert Trout (who'd handled conventions previously for CBS radio) and Roger Mudd were assigned to compete with NBC's Chet Huntley and David Brinkley and ABC's Edward P. Morgan and Howard K. Smith. The change was made in view of ratings and critics' notices-but when CBS remained second to NBC with the new team, Mr. Cronkite was brought back as "national editor" on the 1964 election night.

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